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Weinberger now supporting B-1 bomber

WASHINGTON (UPI)—Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, reversing previous testimony, joined with the CIA Tuesday in assuring Congress that the B-1 bomber will be able to penetrate Soviet air defenses "well into the 1990s."

President Reagan told a White House news conference the manned bomber, which faces strong congressional opposition because of its cost and limited penetration ability, will be superior to the B-52 in payload capacity and speed and will present a smaller target on radar.

The B-1 would "fill the gap" between the B-52 and the new Stealth bomber still in the design stage, the President said.

Weinberger and William Casey, director of the Central Intelligence Agency,

defended the penetration capabilities of the B-1B, the advanced version of the bomber, in a joint letter to Sen. Ted Stevens (R., Alaska), chairman of the Senate defense appropriations subcommittee.

THE SUBCOMMITTEE wrapped up its work Tuesday on the \$201-billion fiscal 1982 defense budget without a vote on the \$4.1 billion appropriation for development of the B-1 and the long-range MX missile. It left the decision to the full Senate Appropriations Committee meeting next Tuesday.

Weinberger had testified last week that the B-1 would not be able to penetrate Soviet air defenses beyond 1990.

But in their letter, Weinberger and Casey said a mixed force of B-1s armed with cruise missiles and Stealth-technology bombers "will present an extremely difficult problem to the most sophisticated (Soviet air) defense system."

"Defense Department analyses based on the results of these tests indicate the B-1B would have the capability of penetrating anticipated Soviet air defense well into the 1990s in a multitude of employment modes," the letter said.

WITH HIGH SPEED, reduced radar detection and new electronic countermeasures, it said, the B-1 "will severely reduce" the best anticipated Soviet air defense capabilities.

The B-1, the letter said, will be able to "perform effectively as a cruise missile carrier and as a conventional bomber into the next century."

After a two-hour classified briefing for the subcommittee, Defense Undersecretary Richard DeLauer and Air Force Gen. Kelly Burke disagreed with an estimate by the Congressional Budget Office that the cost of 100 B-1 bombers could be as high as \$39.8 billion, almost twice the administration's estimate.

"Not by our calculations," Burke said. "In 1981 dollars, the estimate is \$20.5 billion and we are confident we'll deliver it at that cost."

Burke said the budget office estimate "included a large number of items that we have no intention of putting on a B-1."